



Podcast 123 – Authenticity Sells with Jina Etienne

Eric Green:

Hey everyone. Thank you for joining me for this week's Tax Rep Network Podcast. I am thrilled to have our guests with me today. If you are not familiar with her, please meet Jina Etienne. Many of you probably have because I have, and I got very excited because Jina, I've told folks Accounting Web is coming up. It's their first conference in San Diego. So of course I get the agenda to see where I am. And before me is this keynote about being your authentic self and how that helps you sell and your client relations. I was like, got to have Jina on the podcast, because I'm actually doing a chapter in my next book on that, but it, so if you don't know, Jina she is a CPA, sounds like a recovering CPA, 32 years career as an entrepreneur business consultant C-Suite leader after a 21 near career in public accounting, including 17 running her own CPA firm, she shifted to serving the profession as a director of the American Institute of CPAs.

Then president CEO of the National Association of Black Accountants Inc. She went on to become the first national leader for D&I at Grant Thornton, diversity and inclusion. If you don't know what that is, the six largest CPA firm in the United United States today, she runs her own diversity and inclusion, consultancy practice, specializing in inclusive leadership and development, implicit bias and conscious communications, cultural sensitivity, and awareness, and empowering authenticity and fostering belonging. She also does one-on-one coaching for executives, business leaders, and entrepreneurs to help them improve workplace relationships, team performance, and an intrapreneur interpersonal effectiveness. Jina, thank you for doing this.

Jina Etienne:

Oh, I'm happy to be here, thanks for having me.

Eric:

And so everyone who's listening, Jina and I started talking and we're talking, talking, I said, we got to get started on the podcast. What prompted this? And as I started to tell you, I'm working on my next book and it's about practice building, unlike my other guides, which are on, kind of technical stuff, how do an offer? I do this, this was more practice driven. And one of the things I found is, because it forces you to really think about, what did I do really? Why is this working?

And what I have found is being able to tell clients stories, being a good storyteller. I think is critical, but honestly I think being authentic because the audience connects with you, people connect with you versus my attempting to go out and listen, I know this is going to be a shock, but I'm super sleek. I mean just model thin and no list, no glasses. I'm perfectly jet black hair. Yeah, no, I am a former college football player. I am also a recovering accountant, but I went into something, a worse drug called law. I look like an ex-jock, was a former accountant went into law. I look kind of like, the way I am, but for some reason I connect and it's why I speak at AICPA a and ATP, your accounting web, CCH, and all the rest, you do the circuit as well.

So to give for those folks who are going to be at a accounting web, perhaps a preview, but more than that, can you talk about, well, first of all, sort of how your journey and how did you kind of arrive at this? Because being authentic is not something that was pushed when you and I were back as young accountants going into the big firms.

Jina Etienne: Well, it's not like being authentic is something you can just say, "Oh, you know what, today I'm going to be authentic." Either you are, or you aren't, but you can well in this moment, but you can learn to relax and be more of yourself. But it's hard because today so many people have heard the bring your "whole" self to work and whole is in quotation marks here. And for the record, may I apologize in advance because my landscaper literally is outside my window as we speak. And Eric, he wasn't here. When we first started the call, right?

Eric: He will not be the first landscaper to make an appearance on this podcast.

Jina Etienne: So it's either the landscaper a snoring dog. I just want everybody listening to know that those noises are not coming from me. So back to this thing about bring your "whole" self to work. We all show up in different ways, and it's not that we have multiple personalities, but we do show up differently at home. I'm going to dinner later with my girlfriend and I'm going to be a little slightly different me there than I'm going to be on a Zoom with a prospective client. And then when they become a client, they're going to see a little bit more of me.

And does that mean I'm hiding or covering or pretending? No, it doesn't, but it does mean I'm adapting myself to this situation. A part of adapting yourself to the situation is trying to fit in the organization where you work or in this circumstance that you find yourself in. And the work that we do to fit in is completely normal, as humans we're pack animals, we want to get along, we want to be part of a group. We don't do well in isolation. We definitely don't do well. Lonely humans who are lonely, have higher health issues, shorter life expectancy, or mean, real physical problems.

And so barrier, the challenge becomes what's the line, when are doing that normal stuff to sort of fit in and be part of the group and when are you hiding?

And who's to say what that line is, it's something each of us have to set for ourselves. The only thing I will say though, is what you do know is inside. If what you're doing is not saying something because you're insecure. If you're not saying something, because you're afraid of how people will judge you. Or if you are saying something to try to influence how people will see you and judge you and think of you, then perhaps you're not being your authentic self. Or then, okay, is it authenticity? Or is it insecurity? This stuff is complicated, but we toss around this, bring your whole self to work. We toss around this idea of authenticity, like is the thing we can be. And it's more about how we are showing up and expressing ourselves and not just what I'm saying or doing, but Eric, it's how you're receiving me.

Eric: Well, and it's interesting because today the world in many ways feels like it's gone mad. And so what I find is there are moments where I am curtailing, what would come out of my mouth for the very reason that, for instance, I do not want to have political discussions with people. I don't see anything good coming from it. I kind of wish for the day, do you remember where there was a time when you didn't discuss politics and there's just certain topics you didn't discuss. I kind of miss those days.

Jina Etienne: They were considered not polite.

Eric: Right, and on the one hand I don't want to be, like we should all be, we should all hold back and all be kind of this formal, false whatever. But there are moments where you do really want to curb. It's interesting Jina, I had on, guy I grew up with former Navy Seal and we were talking about the issue of people getting overwhelmed. And he had said something to me years ago that has stuck with me. And he said, the way the Navy seals go through something called BUD/S, Basic Underwater Demolition Seal training. And most people quit because they day after day, they get overwhelmed. They got six months of this. And he told me, he said, you keep your world small. I'm going to focus on not the whole pie, just the piece.

Let me get through this piece. I'm not worrying about that. And I thought it was helpful. It's been very helpful to me. I try to not read too much of the news. I try, because you can wake up and be a nervous wreck the moment before you walk out your house, just from the news, just from all the stuff you have going on. And so I had him on and we talked about that. How do you kind of focus yourself and just focus on the task at hand, not worry about everything else. You can't do anything about it anyway, but I'm wondering how much of that also are we watching people kind of

come apart because of the stress from work, COVID, the unrest social unrest.

I mean, last summer was ugly summer for this country. I'm very hype on the authentic especially when it comes to clients, because to me, clients they're attracted to you or they're not, you could be the most brilliant person in the world, but if there's something sort of, they're off putting things about certain people, but there are moments, like you said, where you're going to show certain aspects of you, but not necessarily everything to everybody.

Jina Etienne: So I think you mentioned this in my bio, but if you didn't, I had my own CPA firm for 17 years.

Eric: I did.

Jina Etienne: And I remember when I first started practice, I came out of the Big 6, if anybody remembers them.

Eric: Yep.

Jina Etienne: There were eight, now there are four. And I started at [inaudible 00:10:31] and I was grateful for the position, I loved the firm. I really appreciated my experience there learned a lot. When I start my own practice then, I try to mirror and I try to set myself up to be like a really teeny weeny baby version of that big firm. So I'm thinking, what are my tax return report covers going to look like, what thought should I use? What quality paper should I use? And I'm literally thinking what's, should I get blonde wood or cherry wood furniture? I'm literally having these thoughts because I'm trying to create a space and to create an image that I am one of the good CPAs, I'm a smart CPA. I am so CPA that you're going to like, believe I'm so to totally CPA, CPA, whatever the hell that even means. I don't have to say that on your podcast.

Eric: Oh yeah, oh, I swear.

Jina Etienne: So I'm trying to create this brand that when people see me, whether they see a brochure, remember when we had those? They see a business card. Remember when we had those? This is before we even have websites. When they see this, they see it and they say, "Ah, yes, she's a CPA because she fits the expectations of a CPA." Well, the challenge with that then was I felt like I had to dress a certain way. I had to talk a certain way. I had to speak about the services in a particular way. And I was so hung up at the beginning of my practice, being that CPA that I wasn't being myself. Now I was being myself, I was just being a very narrow version of myself.

And if anybody's heard me speak, I've shared this story often in different presentations, I've done. There was this one instance I was fully dressed in a suit, makeup, hair, the whole thing. And I went out front and I didn't have my shoes on and I'm walking around the front area without my shoes on. And a client walked in the door and I was kind of mortified because who walks around barefoot in the office? And so I apologize to the client and the client literally laughed. And he said something to the effect of, so in just, I know who it was. He said, "Girl, if you had your shoes on, I wouldn't have recognized you." And I laughed at that, and I thought he was being funny. And then what I realized is my clients know who I am.

I'm just pretending. But they see me because like you, I just put it out there. If you ask me a question, I'm going to answer the question. If you ask for my opinion, I'm going to give you my opinion. And now I let people know, please don't ask me for my opinion if you don't want it. Because I'll give it to you. But I've also learned that if my girlfriend says, "Hey, do you like this dress?" I shouldn't say, "Oh, hell no, I don't like that dress." What I should say is because if I don't like it, what she's really asking is it good for her? And so I can say, no, that's perfect for you. I can totally see why you get it. Totally, see how it looks on you. That looks great on you. I don't have to tell her [crosstalk 00:13:51].

But the old me would've said that. And so I've learned to be nicer, but I still have learned that when I walk around barefoot, it doesn't mean I'm not being professional. And it's okay to do that because people trust you, the person. And you said this earlier, they trust you the person, not the person filling out the tax forms. Anybody can do a tax return in theory. And frankly, we know there are a lot of anybody out there that shouldn't be, but anybody can do a tax return. But understanding the person behind the return that takes a different skill. That takes a level of connection and ability. And that connection requires, it requires us as professionals to do something we were not trained to do in school. And that is to be vulnerable and to share our, hold it, wait for it, wait for it, feelings, right? And that's not something we're trained to do in business school. That's not something they tell you to do in the big firms. That's not something to tell you to do in corporate America.

Eric: Yep.

Jina Etienne: You can leave your feelings at the door. This is work, it's not personal. Well, I'm here to tell you, especially in today's environment, work is very personal. If we've learned nothing from COVID, we have learned that mental health and wellness and difficulty navigating really hard times it lands on all of differently and there's no right or wrong here. And what we really need to do is just acknowledge that we're all suffering in different ways and some people are fine.

Eric: Yep.

Jina Etienne: But that's okay, it's not a judgment.

Eric: And by the way, you may think you're fine, and I have to tell you, COVID for us has been a boon, when we went into shutdown, I was in my backyard. I could work. We were busy as ever. It was, and I there's a lot to unpack. And what you said, and I would've told you everything was great. About nine months in, I really kind of, I had no energy and I spoke to a friend of mine, who's a doctor. And she said, have you ever considered the idea you're depressed and you're stressed out. I'm like, "No." And she said, "I bet you are." And it does impact people differently. But what's funny, so funny when you talked about opening your practice, when I opened mind, there was a book for lawyers called Teach Me to Solo.

And what do they talk about? Where you put your office, got to be in a nice building, furniture. This is your image, the plants, you have to have plants because if you don't have plants, it looks bare artwork. And so it's funny because in this book I'm doing, I'm like, have practice will travel. I have eFax, I have email. I can scan with my phone now. But I could even get a real multifunction. I have this laptop. I have done work in Connecticut where I'm sitting, Miami Tel Aviv, California, I log in, I can work, I can eFax, I can get stuff. The world today has shifted. And if there's a silver lining to the pandemic, if there is one, it has trained clients, no, you do not have to physically come and sit in my office and drink my coffee and see me, Zoom is perfectly fine, the phone is perfectly fine. Yes.

Jina Etienne: Well, but to take it to the next step, if we think about it, so we're talking about authenticity. If we think about it from that lens, it also invited our clients to see us as more like people. And I think that, I know I learned this in my practice. I'm grateful when I sold my practice to go to the AICPA, I was torn. I was excited about the AICPA opportunity, but I was struggling with how I'm going to leave my clients. Okay, yes, there were quite a few in there that were just people who paid me to do the returns. And I did a good job. I think I served them the way I served other clients, but there were far more clients that I had relationships with. I had been there when this client had lost a baby.

And we had to talk about the fact that they still qualify it dependent because they were alive on December 31st. I remember a client who actually was referred to me by a colleague, my colleague brought the client in with her, along with her financial advisor. Her husband died in a plane crash and had received one of those triple benefit payouts because it was a, I don't remember what the term is not catastrophic, but something like that. So she ends up being a multimillionaire for all the reasons she

never wants to be a multimillionaire. Now she needs somebody to help her with a tax return.

Clients come in and their life follows them along. Particularly in tax, and I'm sure it's this way in law. But depending on what area of law you practice, a tax return is someone's life boiled down to numbers on a form. Some things can stay consistent year over year and other things change. And so your clients come to see you as it's so cliché, but it's more than an advisor. Because in one of the things I try to tell people today, especially young professionals that reach out for mentoring, what is it that you offer that they can't get from somebody else? And I'm going to talk about this at an accounting, web and keynote, please don't tell me you're a great accountant.

You can't say I'm the best tax preparer out there. Or I bookkeeping a spot on, or I really know how to do X, Y, Z service, because I'm going to follow that up with, well, I hope so. Well fascinating, you're a dime dozen. There are a lot of you out there-

Eric: Doing good work, it's the bare minimum.

Jina Etienne: Yeah, it goes without saying. So what am I going to get from you? And it's what you were, some of it is what you were talking about earlier, you're going to click.

Eric: Right.

Jina Etienne: But that's not always a good thing. It depends on what people are looking for in the relationship. And sometimes you're going to be a fit and sometimes you're not, but the best thing about authenticity, if you can learn to be vulnerable. And if you can learn to open up and show a little bit more of yourself than the right color font and the right color, the plants and the pictures on the wall that you were talking about. If you can show a little bit more of yourself, you can, the clients that will naturally gravitate toward you, you're going to be aligned in some meaningful way, whether it's values, whether it's vision, whether it's approach, whether it's style and yeah. It all boils down to a tax return in my case.

Eric: Well, that, yeah, but it's-

Jina Etienne: My former case, sorry, I'm no longer a tax person, but yeah.

Eric: Right. But the point is, it actually, instead of being this faceless or emotionless drone, there is whether it's marketing or that relationship in a way what your interests, who you are, what your interests are actually help sell. I have actually one of my Tax Rep members, who's very into cigars

that come a thing where there's a whole community. I know because I do enjoy cigars myself. There's a whole community wrapped around that. And there's an attraction to people who you have the same interests as they do, or whether it's religious groups, whether it whatever.

Whereas I agree when I came into [inaudible 00:22:14] right after the merger and KPMG is where I spent my time, as well as Mintz Levin, one of the very big law firms. No one wanted to see that, your office was sort of, you had your paper on the wall and you're your files and that's what you did. My office, which I'm not in now while we're doing this. But if you could see my office, it is very much designed around me. It is my personality impressed on that office. You got yourself blurred out.

Jina Etienne: Oh, you can see the orange wall behind me?

Eric: Yes.

Jina Etienne: Orange is my favorite color.

Eric: Yep, my wife loved the pomegranates. And so now we literally just redid, what is, I'm doing this from my dining room.

Jina Etienne: Pomegranate wallpaper.

Eric: Yep, she love that.

Jina Etienne: It's what you're talking about, you get to be yourself. I'm not sure where you were going, but I wrote a note here that said, like you, you're looking for people like you, you're looking for familiarity and similarity. That's a bias. So I work in diversity and inclusion and a lot of the DNI conversation has started in the space of bias. And the challenge with the word bias is it implies a bad thing, But we need to strip that out because bias is a brain function, depending on how it's defined. The fact that you seek out and look for and connect with people that are similar to you, it's called human and it's natural. It's a barrier if it's, and it's a problem is a result of that bias, you're overlooking other people. Particularly as it relates to business opportunities, et cetera.

Now, as business owners, I'm an African American woman, I'm black. I go by black. I don't usually say African American. Am I only looking to work with black clients? Ask myself a question because am I more comfortable, familiar? Am I only looking to work with female women, business owners or clients? Familiarity is good and it helps me relax and feel like I can be more of myself because we have something in common. But I think the danger there is that once again, we start to narrow ourselves into something, right? The reality is authenticity is hard. I think

one of the very first sessions I ever did with the title was the authenticity paradox or something like that, or the myth of authenticity, because people have now taken that word to me and I can say whatever I want whenever I want, because that's being authentic.

I can show up and this is the way I dress because it's authentic. And all of those things are true to a point because you need to be yourself, but maybe being too much of yourself in the wrong place at the wrong time, there's something called oversharing.

Eric: I was going to say time and place.

Jina Etienne: Time and place, context matters, relationship matters, purpose matters. I'm not going to wear my wedding dress to Starbucks with my colleagues. That would just be technically I could do it just because you, did you see the movie Jurassic Park?

Eric: Yes.

Jina Etienne: There's a line in there where Jeff Goldblum says when he, when who's the guy, the actor, who's the one who created, had the vision.

Eric: Oh the older gentleman.

Jina Etienne: I don't remember his name or the character or his name, but I know Jeff Goldblum and Jeff Goldblum had a line in there that said something of the, to the effect of, "Just because you can doesn't mean you should."

Eric: Right.

Jina Etienne: And that's the challenge when you talk about authenticity, there's this wide range. There's the whole, the one end of it is be yourself, don't hide, don't cover, don't pretend, don't do things or not do things because you're trying to get people to see you a particular way. That's one extreme. On the other extreme, you don't get to just say whatever you want, do whatever you want wherever you want. Yes, you can do that. But to one end and it gets back to what you were saying earlier that you don't want to have conversations, political conversations with people. Well, part of the challenge that we find ourselves in society today, I'm just going to throw out my little opinion and then you can smack me down for it. But part of the challenge I think we have in society is that we have rights with no responsibility and my rights trump, yours.

I shouldn't have used that one word in case somebody hears it out of context, right? My rights are more important than your rights. And one of the challenges is you even talked about it earlier, afraid to say the wrong

thing, maybe it's political correctness, cancel culture. All of that is an issue. If we're not willing to give someone grace.

Eric, let's just say you said something and it just kind of irritated the hell out of me, pissed me off, I'm offended. And I'm starting to look at you through ma side eye, because I'm like, did you really just say that? I could judge you it's easy to judge, but what's harder to do is to say, I think he probably meant something else by that. Let me listen a little bit more. Let me ask a couple questions. Let me just stay in this conversation because I might soon discover that it was not at all what I thought I heard. I heard wrong or I heard right that his intentions were different than what I thought they were. All of that engagement is required for us to ultimately be this authentic self. I can show up as me. But if I'm showing up as me and hitting you over the head with a brick as me, how's that helpful?

Eric: Right?

Jina Etienne: I need to calibrate that.

Eric: And also the understanding people can change.

Jina Etienne: Yes, we grow, we make mistakes. Shockingly, shockingly, we don't do well because we got it right the first time. The reason we're better over time is because each of those little mistakes, hopefully there are no really big ones. But it's the sum of all of those mistakes that have us, that led us to where we are right now. Because you don't do well, because you never made a mistake.

Eric: Well be if you never make a mistake, there's no growth, there's no change, there's nothing. You're consistent. If there's no such thing as redemption, then everything becomes it's like if you're like Star War, one of my kids said it's like the Sess. I was like, huh? You know that everything is black and white. That there's never any, and if you say do something bad, you can't recover from that. You can't grow from it. President Obama was against gay marriage. By the end of his presidency, he was for same sex marriage. Why? He looked at the issue in over those eight years, it changed his opinion. Am I supposed to hate the man because when he first ran, he said he was against it. No, I believe people can change. I'm sure my opinions have changed on everything. I'm sure if you go, if I went back and dug through it over time.

Jina Etienne: Yeah you don't want to know what I thought in high school. I don't want to know what I thought in high school.

Eric: Well, in high school-

Jina Etienne: Thankfully I survived all of these years and have not. I think that any one of us, if we dipped back into our past, somebody could pull out something that would result in any one of us being canceled. In any moment there, but for the grace of God go ye. Anyway, it just, we could talk, the thing about authenticities you could talk about it from every possible angle. At the end of the day, the voice that you're using, the mannerisms that you're using, the expressions on your face, the decisions you make, should all come from a place of belief that what you're doing is the right thing to be doing in that moment, in that context, for this situation, for this person, for this objective. And you're not holding back, pretending, lying, anything in that process, you're putting what you have out there. And then trusting that process. Trust is a little terrifying, but trusting the process. But if the other person's doing the same thing, you'll be fine.

Eric: Well, and I agree a thousand percent. And so what I would suggest to the audience listening is a couple things. One, I couldn't maintain a fake. You can't maintain that. I mean, you can get away with it for an hour, maybe one day, maybe one conference. But at some point the real me, the real you will come out, so I can't be bothered. Same thing with lying. I can't bother trying to, I couldn't keep track just, it's not worth the stress that it would cause trying to keep track of everything. So one is, I think just being you, it's just easier. It's less stress, but more than that, when it comes to selling, especially, speaking.

When I get up in front of a group, they don't have to, the group does not, for me to be effective, what I've discovered, they don't need to agree with me, they need to believe that I believe what I'm saying. If I'm authentic, if they get the sense, I am passionate about this, this is what I believe. Even if they disagree, it's generally a great talk. I generally have, people are attracted to that versus I come out in something that is very canned or clearly that has been, the word is escaping me. I don't want to say practice-

Jina Etienne: cookie cutters.

Eric: Yeah, cookie cutter or to the point of where it starts to border on fake, when people get the sense that it's not really you they're going to tune out. It does the reverse, it now makes you less attractive.

Jina Etienne: Well, I would also add, I think that part of why that works, especially as a speaker is you've also got to appear, not righteous. You have to be putting things out there as this is what you've think these have been your experiences. These are my stories. And you're still discovering. You're still growing. You're still learning. But this is what I know as of right now. And here's why I believe these things. And you seem approachable, you seem reasonable. I can see how you think, what you think. That is how I can sit in an audience and listen to you, even if I don't agree with you,

because you're just there. And I can get a sense of you as a person, but you're right. If I see people standing on stage and they're speaking, and it sounds like they're reading their script, it rings as disingenuous. It makes me wonder, I might agree with information you're giving, but I'm not necessarily trusting the vehicle that I'm getting the information from.

Eric: Well, put.

Jina Etienne: On the other hand, there are people who are masterful in reading a script, and you'd never know they're reading a script. That could be a bad thing, it depends. I mean, a context of this, the challenge of this conversation, Eric, because you and I could talk about this all day. Because this stuff is complicated. It's nuanced and it's in some places it's also feels black and white. And when I hear people talk about authenticity, it's like we boil it down to a thing. We boil it down to being our real selves. What the hell does that even mean?

Because like I said, I mean, so I am going to dinner tonight with my girlfriend. I'm going to be a slightly different version of me at that dinner for a couple of reasons. One, because we have our relationship, that's a little bit different than the relationship I have with my sons. The other one is I'm free my husband's not there. So I can maybe say and do things that I wouldn't necessarily say or do around him. Not because of him, but because friends like to talk about things and some of the things I want to talk about are my challenges. One of which might be something I'm going through with my husband.

I can do that with a friend and a way that I can talk about my challenges with her, with my husband, not with her. Well, maybe I could, but that doesn't mean I'm being inauthentic. It's just, I'm showing up differently. And I think the bottom line to authenticity, especially for business owners is you can't, you said this earlier, you cannot fake your way into success.

Eric: Nope.

Jina Etienne: I think one of the best lessons I learned when I was in practice is I could make a mistake, but it doesn't matter. You can always amend a return if there's trust. And I don't remember what it was. Somebody just tweeted the other day. It was somebody on tax report tweeted about some horrible client that treated them a particular way. And they wanted to fire the client. And I don't know why, but what I responded was then there are the good clients. My father passed away right before a labor day.

My tax practice was one where everything went on extension everything. And I was lucky if I even filed mine on time, even after that. But his funeral was right after labor day. And I literally had clients, some of them

actually came into the office. I was surprised it was more than one and said, it's okay if my return goes late, I know you'll take care of it. I mean, who does that. And they knew if the return went late and there were penalties or there's a problem, I got you, they know that I got them. And so they just trusted me. That was very powerful for me to hear that. And that meant that they knew who I was and saw me as more than their tax preparer.

You don't get that by faking it. You don't get those relationships by being what you think they... Okay, help me out, how do I do this by being [crosstalk 00:37:39].

Eric: You don't want to, right? Exactly, I was going to say, yeah, you don't want try to fake your way to be what you think they think you should be.

Jina Etienne: Thank you, those words are the words I was trying to use. I watched Top Chef. And what's funny is about how many people on Top Chef, they learn the hard way that you can't cook what the judges want. You have to cook your food. And the judges just want good food.

Eric: It amazes me on that show, how many contestants who always get go out, decide to try something they've never done before of all the times you're going to try, I'm trying to think of just, I can think of a handful of them. One of them, she was going to do was an Ostro J for something.

Jina Etienne: Oh yeah, yeah, I know.

Eric: And this is years ago, and I was like, okay, that is a really bad idea.

Jina Etienne: I'm re-watching all of the seasons because you know COVID. And recently there was a guy who it was Dana Cowin came on and they said, was it a kale salad? Or it was something that is so cliché. And so I want you to prove that this is still a good thing reimagine it in another way. Basically, I don't want to see a salad. And so there's this one chef who says, I don't think she's had a salad that she's going to really like, so I'm going to make a salad. And all I could think about was the arrogance, the arrogance, you were explicitly told not to make a salad and you made one anyway.

Eric: In other words-

Jina Etienne: And it's relevant-

Eric: Please throw me off the show.

Jina Etienne: Yeah, and he did he, well, it was a quick fire, so he didn't get eliminated, but he definitely lost. And one of the things that they said when they were tasting his food is she said something so pointed as, so I asked you not to make a salad and you made a salad. And in that moment he felt like a jerk. You could see it on his face, like an idiot. And I mean, those are those moments where, you're showing up in a particular way with a particular client because you know better. You're the smart one here in this room, my client doesn't know. Not that you're going to say this to the client, but you believe about yourself.

Here's the thing, they can see you, your clients can see you. Which is why you just have to be, you can't fake it. You said it before, you can't lie your way into something over time, it's going to fall apart. You can't pretend your way through your career, over time it's going to fall apart. Or when the moment matters when your father passes away and you really could use some people to just stand beside you and hold you up. There won't be anybody there, you know?

Eric: Nope, it happens, an example that I can use, because I am Jewish, I happen to have Orthodox clients. Now I can talk, I can speak the speak, I can walk the walk, but it's not really me. I'm not Orthodox. I kind of concluded a long time ago. I am not going to try to fake that. I'm not going to pretend what I am not because they will see right through it. I mean, it trusts me within five minutes, they're going to know I'm, I'm full of it. And I have to tell you the truth. They accept me, we get along great. They become great referral sources. I'm respectful when I am at their place. They're generally respectful. This is who I am, and they're good with it.

Jina Etienne: That's the thing. If you show people who you are, they're going to accept you or not accept you. And if you show them who you are and they accept you, you're in, you're done, you have a relationship. And then trust builds from there. You can lose trust. You can rebuild trust, and trust lost and rebuilt can often be stronger than the generic trust you get when you meet somebody. But it's better if they meet you and they know, okay, this guy's not Orthodox, but he's a good guy and we trust him. And here's the thing. A lot of people in their world aren't Orthodox. So to who are you trying to pretend to be for their sake? So anyway, no, I agree, and this stuff is not easy to do. There are a lot of reasons why we don't feel like we can be our authentic selves and that's authentic selves for whatever that means to you. Whatever that means to the person listening to this podcast, authenticity in your eyes, my eyes or Eric in your eyes is highly subjective.

But the barriers to authenticity are fear of embarrassment, fear of isolation, fear of judgment, fear of being shamed. These are very real fears and it happens in our communities, but it happens at work in much more subtle ways. And at work, our mortgage is on the line, our health insurance is on

the line. Our career progression is on the line. There's a lot at stake that changes the dynamics of why I might not want to be my authentic self, not to mention power dynamics at play, in the workplace. So I just, just want to acknowledge this stuff is hard, there's no right answer. There's no uniform definition. It's highly experiential, and it's really about every person just asking themselves, are they pretending? Are they covering? Are they holding back? Are they doing things because they're wearing a mask, if you will and they're trying to protect that mask.

And if they are then there's opportunity for you to work on self-awareness there's opportunity for you to work on not just internal self-awareness like what do you stand for? What do you believe? Who do you really want to be? And are you showing up that way? Internal self awareness, but external self awareness. So how do people see me? Because when you can sync those two things up, you can toss the mask. All right, so that's going to be my thing, sync it up and toss the mask.

Anyway, I hope this has been helpful because there's no single answer. The challenge is even harder when you're a business owner, if it's at high risk, when you're an employee it's an even higher risk when you're a business owner. Because as a business owner, you're the executive, you're the advisor, you're the boss.

Eric: And it's your dollars on the line and yeah, no, everything is jacked up when you're the owner.

Jina Etienne: The stakes are high.

Eric: So no, I think. so, listen, before I let you go, how can these folks get ahold of you? If people do want to, have you consult with them, if people do want coaching one-on-one, where can people find you?

Jina Etienne: They can find me on LinkedIn. They can find me on Twitter, I'm MissTaxCat. I've been thinking about changing that, but I've been MissTaxCat forever. There's a story for that. My company is a Facebook page and my website, of course, Etienne Consulting. The challenge for me is always my name. Sometimes I wish I was Smith, Smith Consulting. People know how to spell it, they know how to find it. Etienne Consulting little bit more challenging, but I'm out there and I would love the opportunity to work with anyone, whether it's training, keynotes, consulting, helping people with strategy, particularly small firms because small firms and organizations don't have a budget for a chief diversity officer or to bring in a diversity expert to build that strategy.

But it's also difficult to know where to go. What do I start with? As leaders, what do I need to know to do this right? Well, you can hire

somebody like me to come in. We're not as expensive as hiring, I'm trained to come in and do your training and really help find solutions that would work for your business, your entity. So that's what I do and I'd love to have those opportunities for anybody listening.

Eric: Yep, and I will definitely put some links down below in the description so you can find Jina and hopefully you'll be joining us at accounting Web Summit in San Diego where you can actually see both of us. She actually goes before I do on the first day. Well, the first real day on Tuesday, the 10th and-

Jina Etienne: Real day.

Eric: Well, the first day I think they have like day one is arrival. It's like day one arrival, day two is the first day of session.

Jina Etienne: I'm also doing a panel in the afternoon. I'd encourage people to come, we're talking about culture.

Eric: Very nice.

Jina Etienne: Culture of innovation. So, well, that's going to be fun.

Eric: And listen, thank you for doing this. Thank all of you for listening in. Again, I will put Jina's information down below. You can reach out and connect with her and thank you.

Jina Etienne: Thank you for having me.

Eric: I will see you in San Diego.